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SUBJECT: TURKEY: CENTER-RIGHT LEADER AGAR: POLITICIANS TO
EXPAND SCOPE FOR DEMOCRACY; LET THE MILITARY STICK TO
DEFENSE

REF: ANKARA 6014

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: In Ambassador's November 24 meeting Mehmet Agar, leader of the center-right True Path Party (DYP), Agar focused mainly on DYP's domestic strategy to answer society's demands for change that he believes the current Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has not met. For DYP, democracy, rule of law and the free market are all indispensable, as is the preservation of Turkey's EU prospects. It should be up to the politicians to expand the scope for civil society and democracy; the military's role should be to defend the country. Agar reiterated that he believes an amnesty will be a pre-condition to ridding the country of the terrorist PKK. End summary.

12. (C) Agar examined three arenas: political, economic and social. Politically, AKP had failed to meet society's demands for transformation, transparency in government and accountability. In economic restructuring, AKP has succeeded, at least in part. Its economic program now needs to be revised to increase investments. Small and medium-sized businesses, instrumental in bringing the current government to power, are not happy, and it is tough for the middle class and lower income brackets to get by. Needed structural reforms in tax and social security have lagged; the economy remains vulnerable to global shocks.

13. (C) Agar said that in the social arena, Turkey must rid itself of long-standing tensions. Most important among these is the southeast, where the government has taken no serious steps. Having waited patiently for four years, Agar said he finally went public, describing the problem and some possible solutions (reftel). It was received positively by the people, if not by the military.

14. (C) On the current juxtaposition of secularism and religion, Agar said it was a mistake to polarize society with "false choices": religion (AKP) on the one hand and republicanism, nationalism and secularism on the other (opposition People's Republican Party - CHP - and the National Action Party - MHP). It was wrong to play the nationalism card as it could only lead Turkey into isolationism. As for religion, Agar explained that while the center-right does not use religion as a reference point, it needs to reach out to religious groups and sects. For him,

the definition of moderate Islam is secularism, but with Islamic sectors of society not neglected.

¶5. (C) Agar expressed his determination to once again make DYP the Democrat Party (the party's name until 1960, when its then-PM, Adnan Menderes, was hanged in the aftermath of the country's first military coup) in order to move the country forward. The series of military interventions had retarded Turkey's democratic development. Islam, secularism, republicanism - all are ours, Agar stated, and all can coexist, but only within democracy. Laicism (secularism) was necessary to maintain social peace; it was the "magic formula" that allowed Turkey entree into the western world.

¶6. (C) For Agar, a "democratic opening" equates roughly to Turkey resolving its own domestic issues - whether the PKK problem, EU accession-related issues or attaining a more workable and modern civil-military balance. This in turn would give Turkey a freer hand in foreign policy and ratchet down existing tensions. It would, for example, permit Turkey to play a more useful role in the Middle East, both as model and possible arbiter. It would benefit the US because Turkey would no longer constantly slam us as being passive toward the PKK. US-Turkish relations, he noted, should not be held hostage to 3,000 PKK on Kandil Mountain in northern Iraq. Agar, a former security director and interior minister, said he knows the services the US already renders - intelligence sharing, for example, and provision of materiel. Otherwise, eliminating the PKK threat should be Turkey's business. The GOT must both establish organic ties with people in the southeast to prevent new recruits from going to the mountains and, at the same time, take economic and social measures. The people in the southeast are ready and open to

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initiatives. All are Turkish citizens who must be respected and honored as such. The EU has made a serious opening on individual rights - they must be implemented. Moreover, DYP remains committed to the EU process, even if it is in fashion to bash Brussels.

¶7. (C) If politicians use the same language as the military, Agar maintained, they will not be to resolve the region's problems. Politicians must speak a different language - one of civilian and democratic discourse. The job of politicians is to enlarge the sphere for civilian and civil society activity and to convince the military that it is the right path.

¶8. (C) Turks, as inheritors of an empire, cannot afford to turn inward; they must pursue policies designed to embrace their neighbors. Nor can Turks look down on their neighbors. Agar said that the future of the region -- of Syria, Iraq and Armenia -- depends on that. An Armenia with 1.5 million people, for example, cannot be an enemy. Some 70,000 Armenians enjoy protection and work in Turkey. Tomorrow, if DYP comes to power, "we may open the border gates. And if we open them, will the Armenian government have the power to close them?" Agar asked.

¶9. (C) Agar expressed concern about the possibility of an Armenian "genocide" resolution. It should not be passed because of the very real risk that it could throw up barriers in the region and hamper steps governments (including a DYP-led government) would want to take. Turkey must be run by people of courage but the conditions have to be right to exercise that courage.

¶10. (C) Agar believes that, in upcoming elections, nationalism alone will not triumph. CHP/MHP - the nationalist right and left - cannot succeed, he stated, if not supported by Islam. He foresees as well the need for an opening to Turkey's Alevi citizens. Turkey's Alevis are not like their Shi'a brethren in Iran and must be able to live freely in democracy. Freedom of religion and of conscience must not be the subject of politics - that is the point of

secularism. On presidential elections, Agar believes there should first be a general election. A parliamentary election followed by a presidential election would produce a healthier, less controversial process.

¶11. (C) Speaking privately, Agar stated that it won't be possible to put an end to the PKK without an amnesty. "I stood up against the TGS chief," he continued; Buyukanit spoke perhaps in haste, he added, but Agar believes it worked to his own advantage. He has carried the same message to the big cities of the west with large Kurdish populations. He is, however, realistic; DYP has an election to win and cannot afford to spell out the specifics of what it would do before the election. It could, however, imply an amnesty. This would be an important opportunity for Turkey. To date, two important turning points were wasted: first, when the state eliminated excessive PKK violence in the period 1993-96 and second, when Ocalan was caught. The AKP government cannot do it; it cannot afford to challenge the military. "We can't rule a state without the military to protect our borders, but we can't pursue politics with the military," Agar stated. People want a solution; not terrorism, and they will vote en masse for whomever they think will succeed.

¶12. (C) Ambassador divided the PKK issue into four aspects: continuing to work to neutralize the PKK presence in Turkey; work in Europe to cut off funding and propaganda; the northern Iraq piece; and what Turkish does itself, which may require some political courage, especially in an election year. Agar agreed, stating that it was his job to make the Turkish army understand what democracy is. EU anti-military rhetoric is problematic; it has to be handled internally. Achieving a civil-military balance in Turkey would be a great achievement.

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